

Highlights from May 15 Bird Walk to Walden Ponds

Chuck Aid. May 16, 2021 :



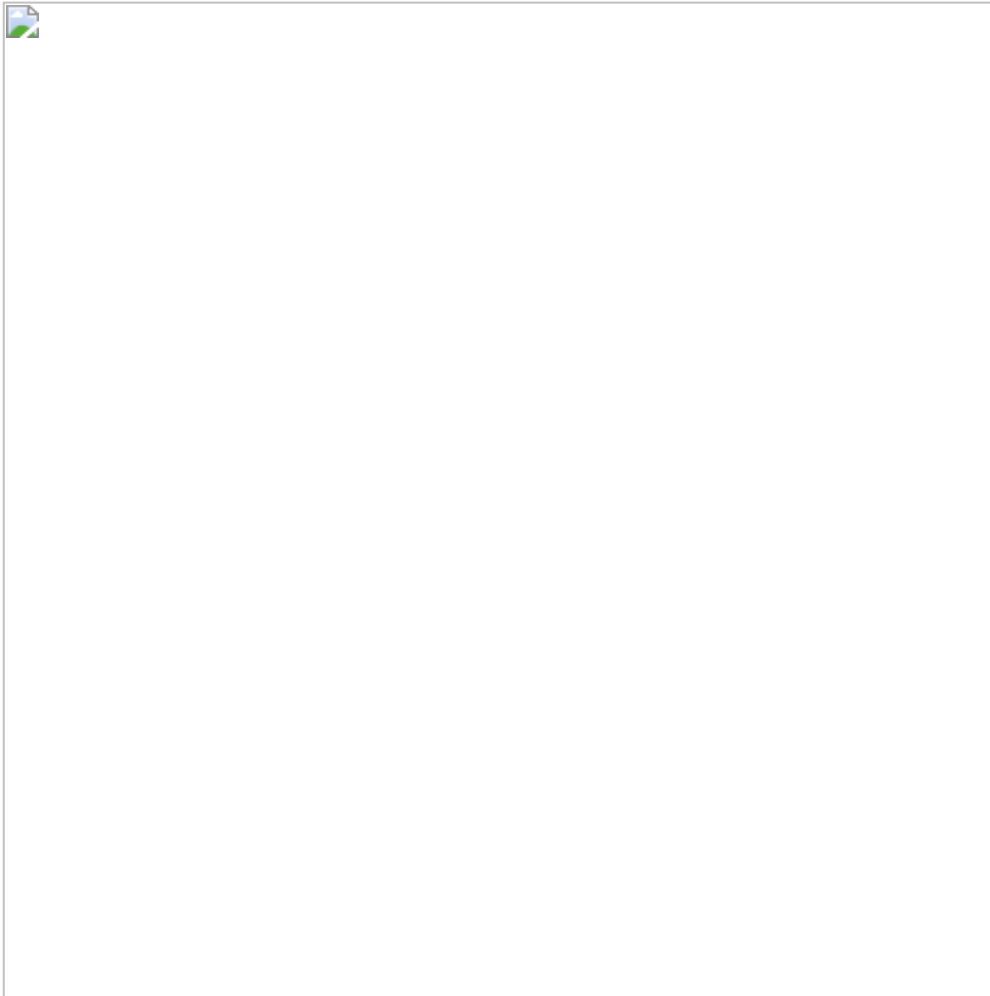
American White Pelican (c) Mick Thompson

There are about eighteen ponds in the Walden Ponds area, which is immediately east of Boulder Creek. Then, west of the creek there are another six ponds and Valmont Reservoir is only about a mile to the south. So, there is a lot of water in the area, and there can generally be a slew of waterfowl everywhere. This morning we did well seeing such birds as Canada Goose, Pied-billed Grebe, Western Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, American White Pelican, Great Blue Heron, and Snowy Egret. However, our duck tally was quite low with only three species, Wood Duck, Northern Shoveler, and Mallard. Apparently, many of the fifteen duck species or so that we see quite readily in the winter have begun to head north, and we just struck out on some of the other ones that should be around at this time of year. We saw none of the three teal species, and the small ponds just aren't extensive or deep enough for us to find Northern Pintail, Redhead, or Common Merganser. On top of that, all of the ponds this morning

were fairly full of water, resulting in minimal exposed gravel or mud flats, and our only shorebirds were a few Killdeer.

Wood Duck pair (c) Mick Thompson

Following up on a Wood Duck discussion we had, here are a few details on their breeding. Wood Ducks are the only North American duck that regularly produces two broods each breeding season. The male follows the female around while she selects the preferred cavity for nesting. Clutch size is generally about 9-12 eggs, but as many as 20 have been recorded. The female does all of the incubation which lasts about 30 days, generally taking two 1.5-hour recesses per day to feed. Ducklings leave the nest within 24 hours of hatching, but first mom sits in the cavity opening checking for any potential predators. If the coast is clear, she flies down to the ground or water below and calls the ducklings to follow her. They immediately climb to the cavity entrance and leap from the nest, receiving no assistance. This jump has been recorded to be as far as 90 feet, which the ducklings survive without injury. They then stick with mom for about a month but can readily forage independently.



Osprey (c) Mick Thompson

We did well with the raptors, noting five species. One of the highlights was getting to see a pair of nesting Osprey. These birds are found worldwide, and ours here in western North America tend to spend their winters along the west coast of Mexico and Central America. When they come north to breed, they head

primarily to Alaska, western Canada, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and scattered locations along the Rockies as far south as central New Mexico. The female does about seventy percent of the incubation, but the male is on duty to bring her food and do a bit of egg sitting.

Bullock's Oriole (c) Mick Thompson

Other highlights included a good number of Yellow Warblers and Yellow-rumped Warblers; all of the latter appeared to be of the Audubon race with their yellow throats. We also had a single Eastern Kingbird, a couple of Warbling Vireos, a pair of Bullock's Orioles, and a couple of American Goldfinches. Finally, we had a vociferous Gray Catbird which was a joy to hear and see. It was interesting to note how few sparrows we saw, just one Song Sparrow and one White-crowned.

Overall, it was a great morning with a great group!

Chuck

Walden Ponds, May 15, 2021 (10 participants)

44 species (+1 other taxa)

Canada Goose 26
Wood Duck 7
Northern Shoveler 1
Mallard 13
Pied-billed Grebe 1
Western Grebe 3
Eurasian Collared-Dove 1
Mourning Dove 7
Killdeer 4
Double-crested Cormorant 8
American White Pelican 3
Great Blue Heron 11
Snowy Egret 1
Turkey Vulture 1
Osprey 2
Bald Eagle 2
Swainson's Hawk 2
Red-tailed Hawk 1
Belted Kingfisher 1
Downy Woodpecker 2
Northern Flicker 3
American Kestrel 1
Eastern Kingbird 1
Warbling Vireo 2

Blue Jay 4
Black-billed Magpie 1
American Crow 1
Common Raven 2
Black-capped Chickadee 2
House Wren 7
European Starling 6
Gray Catbird 1
American Robin 13
House Finch 6
American Goldfinch 2

White-crowned Sparrow 1
Song Sparrow 1
Yellow-breasted Chat 2
Bullock's Oriole 2
Red-winged Blackbird 65
Brown-headed Cowbird 2
Common Grackle 6
Yellow Warbler 12
Yellow-rumped Warbler 5
Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's) 11